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AGENCY OPPOSES PROPOSED TRANSFER OF MASS. ENVIRONMENTAL POLICE

The state budget proposed by the Massachusetts House Ways and Means Committee would transfer the Division of Law Enforcement (Massachusetts Environmental Police) from the Department of Fisheries, Wildlife & Environmental Law Enforcement (DFWELE) of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs to the Executive Office of Public Safety.

“We adamantly oppose the proposed transfer, which was inserted in the state budget proposal without debate, public hearings, or any opportunity for comment from the general public or interested constituent groups such as the state’s sportsmen, the commercial fishing community, and environmental organizations,” said DFWELE Commissioner David Peters. “The Environmental Police are charged specifically with the protection of our environment, natural resources and public health, and they belong in the Environmental Affairs Secretariat, not in the Public Safety Secretariat. That is why groups such as the Massachusetts Sportsmen’s Council, the organization representing more than 300 sportsmen’s clubs in the Commonwealth, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society, have expressed their opposition to this proposed transfer.”

The Massachusetts Environmental Police division is a specialized force of about 110 enforcement personnel dedicated to the enforcement of the Commonwealth’s environmental and natural resource protection statutes and regulations. Enforcement of the laws regarding inland and marine fishing, hunting, trapping, endangered species, boating, illegal waste disposal, hazardous waste, and wetlands protection represent the core of the Environmental Police’s mission. This is why Environmental Police Officers, unlike any other police in Massachusetts, are required to have at least two years experience or education in a natural resources related field such as wildlife management, forestry, or marine science, as a prerequisite to becoming an officer.

The Environmental Police are charged with statewide natural resource and environmental protection and enforcement of specialized public use activities at state forests, parks, public waterways, wildlife management areas, boat access sites, and the coastal waters of the Commonwealth. Officers also play an important role in the education and promotion of safety in boating, all-terrain vehicle use, and hunting. In addition, the Environmental Police work collaboratively with constituent groups and regulatory agencies such as the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife and the Division of Marine Fisheries to develop enforceable environmental regulations.

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“Protection of the environment, enforcement of important marine fisheries laws, and a host of other environmental laws is becoming more critical in our society, not less so,” Commissioner Peters said. “We need to strengthen our commitment to enforcement of our environmental laws, not risk the possibility that the Environmental Police become more focused on anything other than the protection of our natural resources.”

“Everyone agrees that criminal law enforcement, homeland security, and public safety measures are extremely critical law enforcement functions,” Commissioner Peters said. “But we feel that the state police and city and town police handle these functions exceptionally well, and the Massachusetts Environmental Police should remain within Environmental Affairs and work to strengthen their commitment to conservation, public health, and the enforcement of environmental laws.”